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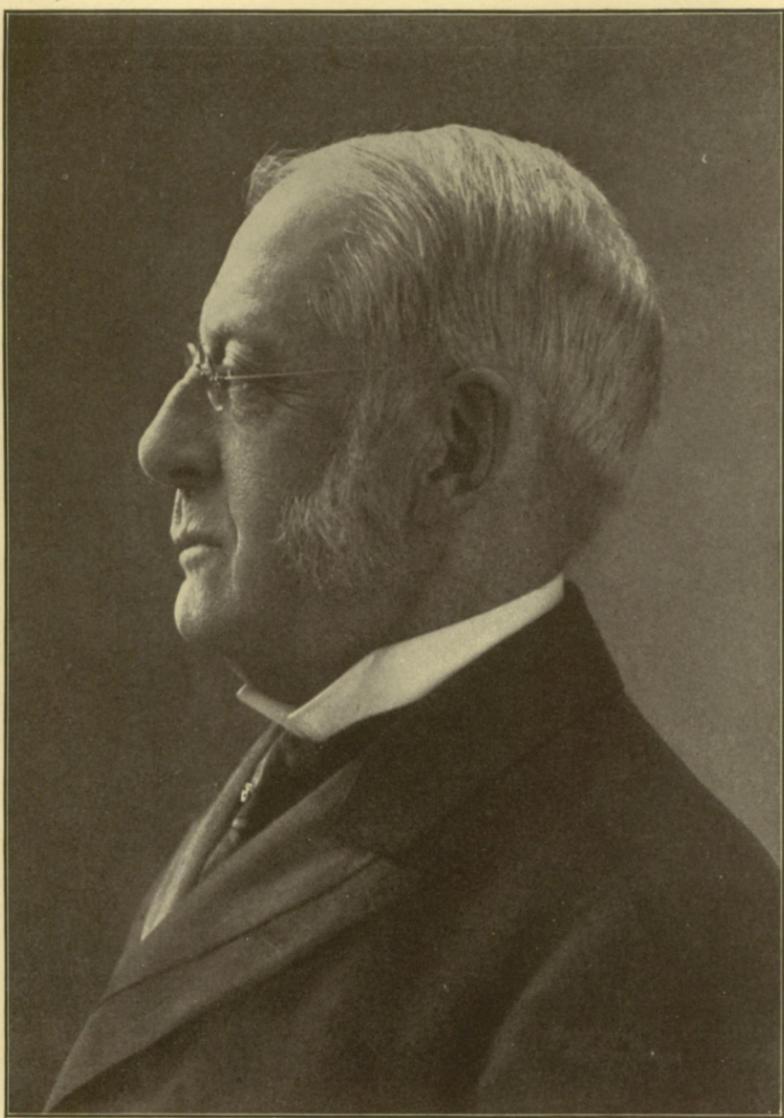
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THE GREAT MINDS OF AMERICA.

II.—CHARLES WILLIAM ELIOT.

THE most important possession of a democracy is not its government, but its educated freemen. The university, the college or the school may exist without the aid of government and irrespective of its form—indeed, it flourishes best the slighter its connection with the state; but without education the democracy cannot attain, or nearly approach, its ideals. Education has been enormously diffused by democracy, and it is itself necessary to the proper working of the government of democracy.

Education not only imparts information, but, in the very act of doing this, if it be done properly, it trains the powers of the mind and thus gives to the individual intellectual effectiveness which is of moment not only to himself, but to his country; it develops and ennobles the character; it makes human life a joy to its possessor, and a benefit to its time. The highest product of our schools is the educated gentleman, who serves his fellows with all the power of his trained mind, and with the willingness of his gracious unselfishness. He may fill public place, but, in our democracy, this would be unusual. In democracy and in modern life, government is most important; but those who direct the workings of the government and apply the law, or who legislate, need not be, and usually are not, men of the foremost intellectual

rank. Richer and more enticing, and essentially nobler, opportunities are offered to the private citizen than to the public servant.

President Eliot has written that "real leaders of American thought in this century have been preachers, teachers, jurists, seers and poets." In exposing the fallacy that "the educated classes become impotent in a democracy, because the representatives of those classes are not exclusively chosen to public office," he says that, in the United States, public offices are conspicuously not the places of greatest influence; that "political leaders are very seldom leaders of thought; they are generally trying to induce masses of men to act on principles thought out long before. Their skill is in the selection of practicable approximations to the ideal; their arts are arts of exposition and persuasion; their honor comes from fidelity under trying circumstances to familiar principles of public duty."

It is well for the democracy, as it is well for its government, when its servants are "men of intelligence, education and honor," who will pay that deference to its thinkers which is, at once, a recognition of the value of the "familiar principles of public duty," which they have declared, and which they maintain by exposition, and, more important still, by teaching.

President Eliot himself is one of the foremost men of influence that this country has ever possessed; but, while he exerts influence, he has no political authority. He is one of our leaders of thought, and because he is so, and because of men like him by whom the country has been influenced, and will be influenced again, our democracy has attained its present position. Whatever hope there may be for the permanence of the republic is based mainly upon the achievements of men in private station whose thoughts have been embodied in our laws, or in the conduct of public men, and upon the influence of men whose inspiring eloquence and poetry have deepened our patriotism.

As we have said, President Eliot is one of those great citizens whose influence is of larger value to us than the authority exercised by public officers—presidents, or governors, or lawmakers. In the university, and out of it, or beyond it, he has been the constant teacher of the great truths which are essential to virtuous citizenship and to efficient and enduring democratic government, and it is well to inquire as to the nature of his teachings.

As President of Harvard University, he has revolutionized the

system of higher education in this country; and, in the nearly forty years during which he has held this office, he has seen adopted in nearly every American university and college of importance his system of training the aptitudes of youth, a system which recognizes the truth that all minds are not alike and cannot, therefore, be properly developed in the same way, by the same studies. The system has its critics, as well as its admirers; but it is, after all, the system which affords the best opportunity to the best minds, the opportunity which was denied by the old practice of prescribing a single curriculum for all minds—minds which rejected the proffered entertainment, thereby failing to receive the nutrition which they needed, as well as minds which assimilated the nourishment with the delight that waits upon good digestion.

Thus much President Eliot has done for the improvement of the character of the American instrumentalities of education, for the increase of the powers of the American mind. In so brief a sketch as this is to be, however, it is necessary to hasten on to a consideration of his utterances on the state, on the citizen, on the spirit which should animate both.

Eliot emphasizes the superiority of the intellectual man, and of his place and work. He naturally sets a smaller value upon the deeds of the man of action than upon the plans, the theories, the discrimination, the sense of proportion, the prescience, the beliefs and the achievements of the scholar and man of reflection. He asserts that the instruction of the schools of the democracy should not only "stand for the brotherhood and unity of all classes and conditions; it should exalt the joys of the intellectual life above all material delights; and it should produce the best constituted and most wisely directed intellectual and moral host that the world has seen."

There is no one living who more than he has given evidence of being dominated by a very noble and inspiring patriotism. Few public men have ever possessed his clear intellectual view of the meaning and possibilities of democracy, or held so high the torch of liberty—possibly because the mental vision of public men is likely to be obscured, or distorted, or even destroyed, by partisanship or personal interest. Eliot does not count the gains of commerce, or the deeds of man, or the bustling of the multitude, or piled-up riches, or increase of population, or the lucky possession of natural wealth, as the sign of the greatness of the Republic.

He holds that the first great achievement of the Republic is the advance which it has made towards the abandonment of war. At the time he wrote this, the United States had been a party to forty-seven arbitration treaties—"being more than half of all that had taken place in the modern world." War he counts as hostile to individual freedom, which it crushes, as the "school of collectivism, the warrant of tyranny." He speaks of the declamations, which we have heard so often, in eulogy of war as a developer of noble qualities, and considers them the outgrowings of "perverted sentimentality." War is the "most horrible occupation that human beings can possibly engage in. It is cruel, treacherous and murderous." It does not, in fact, afford the most abundant opportunities for the display of courage, of self-sacrifice, of loyalty, of devotion to duty. Many occupations of peace demand as much heroism as is required of the soldier, and much more independent responsibility, and, it may be added, intelligent conduct. He names the locomotive engineer, the electric lineman, the railroad brakeman, the city fireman and the policeman, as the heroes of peace. The free laborer, who will not obey the behests of a union, who persists in working for the livelihood of himself and those dependent on him against the commands and threats, and despite the violence of strikers, Eliot counts as one of the heroes developed by the nineteenth century. Thus he treats the labor problem of his time with the honesty of courage: He has no time to palter with the enemies of civilization; he has no votes to ask of them; he has no dread of their enmity, if, indeed, they are inclined to visit it upon him. He clears the air of the fog of doubts created largely by the timidity and cupidity of politicians. He includes also among his civic heroes the public servant who "steadily does his duty against the outcry of the party press, bent on perverting his every word and act." Such a public servant is of immense value to a democracy, whose "very breath of life" is "free discussion, and the taking account of all opinions honestly held and reasonably expressed."

"Civilized life," he says, "affords plenty of opportunities for heroes, and for a better kind than war or any other savagery has produced."

Also above the material gains of the democracy, Eliot puts religious toleration, the freedom of opinion being established here more firmly than in any other nation. This is "an unexampled

contribution to the reconciliation of just governmental power with just freedom for the individual, inasmuch as the partial establishment of religious toleration has been the main work of civilization during the past four centuries." It appears to him that the idea of great centralized power in church or state is inimical to freedom.

Another idea which he advances is, that the gains of the individual in the democracy, through the education afforded by its widely diffused suffrage, are among the greatest of the country. The free opinion uttered freely, the public discussion of questions upon which all must act, all this presents to the intellectual and educated class an opportunity for power and influence, and, consequently, stimulates the desire for education, with which come "better powers of argument and persuasion, a stricter sense of honor, and a greater general effectiveness."

"Peace-keeping, religious toleration, the welcoming of newcomers, and the diffusion of well-being," Eliot holds "to have been eminently characteristic of our country, and so important that, in spite of qualifications and deductions, which every candidate would admit with regard to every one of them, they will ever be held in the grateful remembrance of mankind. They are reasonable grounds for a steady, glowing patriotism. They have had much to do, both as causes and as effects, with the material prosperity of the United States; but they are all four essentially moral contributions, being triumphs of reason, enterprise, courage, faith and justice, over passion, selfishness, inertness, timidity and distrust. Beneath each one of these developments there lies a strong ethical sentiment, a strenuous moral and social purpose. It is for such work that multitudinous democracies are fit."

This democracy, which has made these great moral contributions to civilization, is likely to endure by reason of the dominance of ethical principles in its life, because of its freedom of opinion, of religious toleration, of its better domestic relations; of the discipline of its exceptionally extended corporation service which leads to mutual trust and helpfulness, all of which together give "the greater hopefulness and cheerfulness to man's outlook on man, the earth, the universe and God." Excellence in sculpture and architecture, painting and literature; vast systems of intercommunication, and other immense public works, no more

than great armies, make republics stable, for Athens, Rome, Venice, and the Italian republics fell notwithstanding such possessions. Eliot teaches that the causes of permanence must be moral and intellectual. The American Republic is strong in its achievements and by reason of them. The price of liberty and union is the costly expenditure which goes on without ceasing, all over the country, the expenditure of willing effort. The "success of the United States as a federal union has been and is effected by the watchfulness, industry and public spirit of millions of men who spend in that noble cause the greater part of their leisure, and of the mental force which can be spared from bread-winning occupations." The good works thus accomplished include the working of the "federative principle, which binds many semi-independent states into one nation," a system which demands not only vital force at the heart of the state, but a diffused vitality in every part." The generous voluntary support of religious institutions; the development of our system of education, also, by voluntary gifts; the freedom of incorporation, making "possible great combinations of small capitals"—and "this, while winning the advantages of concentrated management, permits diffused ownership"—"all this illustrates the educational influences of democratic institutions."

Beyond this bare outline, it is unnecessary to go. We have sufficiently indicated the place which the thinker occupies in the democracy, while we have also pointed to the President of Harvard University as an illustration of the power of influence, a power larger, wider, more complete and necessarily more intelligently gained and exercised than is the power of official authority. He is the teacher who has said that "what is virtue in one human being is virtue in any group of human beings, large or small—a village, a city or a nation; that the ethical principles which shall govern an empire are precisely the same as those which should govern an individual; and that selfishness, greed, falseness, brutality and prejudice are as hateful and degrading in a multitude as they are in a single savage"; moreover, that to succeed, the methods of our democracy "must be representative—which means that they are necessarily deliberative, and are likely to be conservative and slow."